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ABSTRACT

Mandatory evaluation of classroom instruction in the University System of Georgia has posed the problem of whether item context on inventories used to obtain the evaluation (i.e. the content of other items on a questionnaire), and the type of inventory, influence students' global (over-all) appraisal of instruction. This problem, and the question of whether responses obtained in isolation are the same as those in context, were researched. Of the twelve instructors and student classes in the Department of Psychology used for the study, nine chose to use the Summative Appraisal of Instruction, and three chose the University of Georgia Evaluation Form to obtain appraisals. Results indicated that the inventory on which a global appraisal item appears did not influence class average appraisal of instruction. Implications are that teachers are free to select behaviors for which they desire appraisal and can be assured that ratings they receive are independent of items used, and that appraisals of instructors who have used different inventories may be compared, provided that global items on them and class context are the same. Examples of the two inventories, and statistical tables which compare responses to items obtained in isolation and context for both type of inventories, are appended. (Author/AEF)

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The Effect of Item Context on Students' Global Appraisals of College Instruction

Owen Scott
The University of Georgia

The Board of Regents, University System of Georgia, has mandated the evaluation of classroom instruction in every unit in the system. This mandate is flexible, with each unit authorized to develop its own specific procedures. Each unit, may, in turn, delegate the development of specific procedures to its sub-units, with no requirement that the specifics be the same for each sub-unit. Most units and sub-units are likely to include, as one component of evaluation, students' evaluations of instruction. Since the specifics of effective teaching may vary with the content, objectives of instruction, and the characteristics of the students, different units and sub-units are likely to include different items on the appraisal inventories they decide to use. However, each is likely to include at least one item requiring the student to make an over-all or global appraisal of the instruction. If the content of the specific items on the inventory influences these global appraisals, then to some extent they will depend upon the particular inventory used to obtain them.

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The Problem and Hypothesis

The major purpose of the study was to ascertain if item context (i.e., the content of the other items on the inventory) does influence students' global appraisals of instruction. The specific question asked as "Are class mean global appraisals of instruction obtained in isolation the same as those obtained in context?" The major research hypothesis formulated answered this question in the affirmative. The idea underlying this hypothesis is that after experiencing the instruction for a quarter, most students will have made judgments concerning the instructor's effectiveness which superficially reading statements asking for appraisals of specific teaching behaviors is not likely to change. However, on the other hand, it is possible that thinking reflectively about specific teaching behaviors and appraising them may change student's global assessments.

The Research Design and Data Analysis

In classes volunteering to participate a random half responded to a single item asking for a global appraisal of the instruction. The other half responded to the same item included either in the Summative Appraisal of Instruction (SAI) inventory (see Appendix A) or in the University of Georgia Course Evaluation (UGA) form (see Appendix B). The design was thus a treatment (item context) by blocks (instructors) research design. Nine instructors elected to use SAI; three UGA. Since the global items on the two inventories are different (e.g., on SAI the item requires responses on a 1 (A-plus) to 9 (F) scale and on UGA the item requires responses on a 1 (Poor) to 5 (Superior)(scale), it was necessary to treat separately the data obtained with each inventory.

Results

Table 1 contains a summary of the basic data used in comparing the SAI context with isolation. Examination of the means suggests that there

Insert Table 1 about here

were differences in the average global appraisals in the 9 classes and that there were slight differences in the SAI context and isolation means within classes. The results of the ANOVA shown in Table 2 confirm these results.

Insert Table 2 about here

The item context by instructor interaction effect was clearly not significant, the context effect approach significance and the main effect of instructors was highly significant.

The basic data pertaining to the UCA context-isolation comparison are summarized in Table 3. It is obvious that the UGA context mean appraisals

Insert Table 3 about here

and the isolation mean appraisals were almost identical in every class, rendering ANOVA unnecessary. Differences among the three class mean appraisals are also readily apparent.

Discussion

All 12 instructors participating in the study taught in the Department of Educational Psychology. Instructors #5 and #12 taught undergraduate classes. Class sizes were typical of those taught in the department.

Both the SAI and the UGA inventories contain almost all of the items found on such inventories in colleges and universities across the country (Benton, 1974). On both inventories the global item was the last one listed as is the case on most other inventories. The contexts included here, therefor, may be considered typical of those in which global items customarily appear.

Students' appraisals were obtained anonymously with the instructor out of the room and with student knowledge that the appraisals would not be available to the instructors until after official course grades had been posted. The instructions for distributing the materials within classes should have resulted in equal context and isolation n's within each class or in n's differing by 1. Adherence to instructions would result in the random assignment of the context condition or the isolation condition to each student. However, the n's shown in Tables 1 and 3 suggest that in two classes (Instructors #5 and #13) the instructions for distribution were not followed. It is of interest to note that these were the two undergraduate classes. Although these lapses in adherence to instruction are lamentable, they probably had a negligible effect on the results.

The ANOVA summarized in Table 2 was an "expected cell frequencies" ANOVA based on equal context and isolation n's within classes. The effect on the F-tests of the heterogeneity of variance manifest in Table was not deemed serious (see e.g., Myers, 1979, p. 153). What may have been serious, though, is the possible "carry-over" effect of past experience with inventories on the appraisals of students in the isolation condition.

Conclusions and Implications

The results of this preliminary study suggest that the specific inventory on which a global appraisal item appears probably does not influence class average global appraisal of instruction. This conclusion, if true, means that instructors are free to select the specific teaching behaviors for which they desire students' appraisals, to use an inventory containing items pertaining to them, and be reasonably assured that the "global" ratings they receive are independent of these items. In turn, administrators may meaningfully compare the global appraisals of instructors who have used different inventories. Such meaningful comparisons are, however, subject to two restrictions: (1) the global items on the different inventories should be the same (cf., e.g., Scott & Harrison, 1978) and (2) the contexts in which the appraisals have been obtained should be similar in relevant respects (e.g., approximately the same class size, similar course content, similar academic level of the course, similar reasons students have enrolled (required or elective), etc. (see e.g., Kulik & McKeachie, 1975).

References

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Myers, J. L. Fundamentals of experimental design (3rd. ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1979.

Reference Notes

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Table 1

n's, Means and Variances - SAI[a] Context

Compared with Isolation

Instructor No.	SAI	Isolation	Class
	n = 10	n = 11	n = 21
1	$\bar{X}$ = 7.0	$\bar{X}$ = 6.6	$\bar{X}$ = 6.8
	s^2 = 1.6	s^2 = 1.8	
	n = 6	n = 6	n = 12
2	$\bar{X}$ = 8.7	$\bar{X}$ = 83	$\bar{X}$ = 8.5
	s^2 = 0.3	s^2 = 0.7	
	n = 5	n = 5	n = 10
3	$\bar{X}$ = 7.8	$\bar{X}$ = 8.6	$\bar{X}$ = 8.2
	s^2 = 1.1	s^2 = 0.3	
	n = 6	n = 5	n = 11
4	$\bar{X}$ = 5.5	$\bar{X}$ = 3.2	$\bar{X}$ = 4.4
	s^2 = 2.3	s^2 = 3.1	
	n = 9	n = 11	n = 20
5	$\bar{X}$ = 7.8	$\bar{X}$ = 7.3	$\bar{X}$ = 7.5
	s^2 = 1.4	s^2 = 3.0	
	n = 13	n = 13	n = 26
6	$\bar{X}$ = 8.1	$\bar{X}$ = 8.1	$\bar{X}$ = 8.1
	s^2 = 2.1	s^2 = 1.5	
	n = 13	n = 13	n = 26
7	$\bar{X}$ = 5.9	$\bar{X}$ = 4.8	$\bar{X}$ = 5.4
	s^2 = 5.2	s^2 = 6.3	

Table 1 - cont.

Instructor No.	SAI	Isolation	Class
	n = 7	n = 8	n = 15
8	$\bar{X}$ = 7.8	$\bar{X}$ = 8.0	$\bar{X}$ = 7.9
	s^2 = 0.5	s^2 = 0.3	
	n = 9	n = 9	n = 18
9	$\bar{X}$ = 6.9	$\bar{X}$ = 6.9	$\bar{X}$ = 6.9
	s^2 = 0.9	s^2 = 0.9	
Columr.	n = 78	n = 81	n = 159
	$\bar{X}$ = 7.2	$\bar{X}$ = 6.8	$\bar{X}$ = 7.0

[a]SAI - the Summative Appraisal of Instruction Inventory (see Appendix A).

Table 2
Comparison of Mean Global Appraisals in Context (SAI)[a] with Mean Global Appraisals in Insolation

SV	MS	df	F	P
Context x Instructor	2.19	9	.99	---
Context (e)	6.54	1	2.95	<.10
Instructor (I)	29.75	8	13.40	<.001
R/CI	2.22	141	---	

[a]SAI - The Summative Appraisal of Instructor Inventory.

Table 3

n's, Means and Variances - UGA[a] Context Compared with Isolation

Instructor No.	UGA	Isolation	Class
	n = 13	n = 12	n = 25
10	$\bar{X}$ = 1.3	$\bar{X}$ = 1.8	$\bar{X}$ = 1.8
	s^2 = .05	s^2 = 0.5	
	n = 5	n = 5	n = 10
11	$\bar{X}$ = 5.0	$\bar{X}$ = 5.0	$\bar{X}$ = 5.0
	s^2 = 0	s^2 = 0	
	n = 8	n = 12	n = 20
12	$\bar{X}$ = 4.1	$\bar{X}$ = 4.2	$\bar{X}$ = 4.2
	s^2 = 1.3	s^2 = 0.4	
Column	n = 26	n = 29	n = 55
	$\bar{X}$ = 3.2	$\bar{X}$ = 3.3	$\bar{X}$ = 3.3

[a]UGA - University of Georgia Faculty Courses Evaluation Form (see Appendix, B).

APPENDIX A

Owen Scott
1980 Revision

SUMMATIVE APPRAISAL OF INSTRUCTION

Please read each of the following items carefully and respond to Sections I and II by using the following key:

1. I STRONGLY DISAGREE that the item is an accurate description.
2. I DISAGREE that the item is an accurate description.
3. I AM UNDECIDED as to whether the item is an accurate description.
4. I AGREE that the item is an accurate description.
5. I STRONGLY AGREE that the item is an accurate description.

Section I. The Instructor

1.	Was friendly.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Was enthusiastic.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Had a good sense of humor.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Wanted students to succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Was well prepared.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Conducted well-organized class sessions.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Was regular in meeting class.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Was available for help when desired.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Provided opportunities for students' feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Explained clearly.	1	2	3	4	5

Specific comments and suggestions:

(Appendix A)

Summative Appraisal of Instruction

Section II. Course Content and Procedures

1.	Course content was intellectually challenging.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Lectures were informal.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Lectures were logically organized.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Lectures contributed to a clearer understanding of course content.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Emphasis was placed on understanding and application.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Outside assignments were aids to understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Quizzes contributed to understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The method of grading was fair.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The textbook contributed to understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	The instructor's handouts contributed to understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Outside assignments were checked and returned promptly.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Quizzes were returned promptly.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Emphasis was placed in important concepts and skills rather than on trivial details.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	In grading more emphasis was placed on mastery of content than on competition with fellow students.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	The instructor wrote helpful comments on quiz papers and outside assignments.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The course content was too difficult.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I had to work hard in this course.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	What I learned in this course was worth the effort I put into learning it.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	The instructor explained clearly procedures used in assigning course grades.	1	2	3	4	5

Specific comments and suggestions:

Section III. Overall Appraisal

1. Compared with other courses in my program of studies, in this course I have learned
   ( ) Much more than in most courses
   ( ) Some more than in most courses
   ( ) About the same as in most courses
   ( ) Some less than in most courses
   ( ) Much less than in most courses

2. In terms of being able to apply what I have learned in this course, in my judgment I can apply
   ( ) Most of what I've learned
   ( ) Some things I've learned
   ( ) A few things I've learned
   ( ) Almost none of what I've learned

3. I will recommend this instructor to friends and fellow students who are planning to take a course of this kind.
   ( ) Yes
   ( ) No
   ( ) Undecided

4. If I were assigning a grade to this instructor for teaching effectiveness, the assigned grade would be
   ( ) A+
   ( ) A
   ( ) B+
   ( ) B
   ( ) C+
   ( ) C
   ( ) D+
   ( ) D
   ( ) F

Specific comments and suggestions:

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA FACULTY-COURSE EVALUATION FORM

This questionnaire gives you an opportunity to express anonymously your views of this course and the way it has been taught. The purpose of obtaining the information is to assist in the improvement of instruction. It will serve this purpose best if you answer the items carefully and honestly.

Indicate the course and instructor at the top of the answer sheet. Respond by blackening the appropriate grid with a soft lead pencil. If you believe the statement does not apply, leave it blank.

To help insure anonymity the instructor will designate a student to collect the forms and answer sheets, and return them to the departmental secretary.

1. What is your class standing: 1. Fresh 2. Soph. 3. Jr. 4. Sr. 5. Grad.

2. Which one of the following was your most important reason for selecting this course?
   1. It was required 2. Advisor's recommendation 3. Subject was of interest
   4. Teacher's excellent reputation 5. Thought I could make a good grade

3. What is your present grade point average? (Leave blank if not yet established.)
   1. less than 2.0 2. 2.0-2.49 3. 2.5-2.99 4. 3.0-3.49 5. 3.5-4.0

4. What grade did you expect to get in this course? 1. A 2. B 3. C 4. D 5. F

5. What grade do you feel you deserve? 1. A 2. B 3. C 4. D 5. F

6. What percentage of class meetings did you attend? 1. 0-20 2. 20-40 3. 40-60 4. 60-80 5. 80-100

7. How many hours per week did you devote to this course outside of class?
   1. 0-2 2. 3-5 3. 6-8 4. 9-11 5. 12 or more

8. What was your interest in this subject prior to taking this course?
   1. nil 2. small 3. average 4. substantial 5. very great

In the items below, estimate how frequently you feel the following occurred.
1. Almost never 2. Infrequently 3. Occasionally 4. Often 5. Almost always

9. The instructor was willing to give individual assistance outside of class.
10. The instructor encouraged students to think for themselves.
11. The instructor gave tests that were reasonable in length.
12. The instructor spent time on unimportant and irrelevant materials.
13. The instructor pitched the presentation above the heads of the students.
14. The instructor encouraged students to ask questions.
15. The instructor tried to get you to see beyond the limits of the course.
16. The instructor was well prepared each day.
17. The instructor clearly described the grading procedures.
18. Test content was representative of assigned material.
19. The instructor stimulated the intellectual curiousity of the students.
20. The instructor was enthusiastic about the subject.
21. The instructor was clear about basic principles.
22. The instructor clearly indicated what material tests would cover.
23. The instructor kept the course moving at a steady pace.
24. The instructor tried to stimulate creative abilities.
25. The instructor gave advice on how to study for the course.
26. The instructor assigned a lot of burdensome busy work.
27. The instructor gave presentations that were logically arranged.
28. The instructor tried to increase the interests of class members in the subject.
29. The instructor's information seemed up to date.
30. In this class I felt free to express my opinions.
31. The instructor explained text materials that were confusing to students.
32. The instructor demanded an unreasonably large amount of work.
33. The instructor seemed well informed about the material presented.
34. The instructor recognized student's difficulties in understanding new material.

For the final two items use the following scale: 1. Poor 2. Fair 3. Good 4. Very Good 5. Superior

35. How would you rate the over-all value of this course?
36. How would you rate the teaching ability of this instructor?

Use the space below and reverse side of this form to comment on specific aspects of this course, especially those things not applicable to all courses such as the effectiveness of teaching aids (slides, films, models), the text, supplemental materials, laboratories, etc. Course_____Instructor_____

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